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Images available upon request.

Elaborate hats to debut in the IMA Galleries at Newfields

Bes-Ben: The Mad Hatter of Chicago features more than 60 flamboyant hats

INDIANAPOLIS, April 10, 2018—In the midst of *Hello Spring* at Newfields, discover the remarkable Bes-Ben hats that once created a fashion sensation in the Indianapolis Museum of Art's new exhibition, [*Bes-Ben: The Mad Hatter of Chicago*](#) open from April 20, 2018 through January 6, 2019.

The exhibition will feature more than 60 original hats, many never on display before, designed by Benjamin B. Green-Field (1898–1988). Known for using non-traditional themes and objects such as firecrackers, real razors, stuffed animals and even plastic fruits and vegetables, Green-Field was celebrated as Chicago's "Mad Hatter" for nearly 50 years and was considered one of the America's most imaginative milliners.

"We are thrilled to bring a large number of these highly original and incredibly imaginative hats together for the first time," said Niloo Paydar, curator of textile and fashion arts. "This exhibition is an ideal setting to introduce the artistry of the creative genius behind the hats to a new generation of guests who will likely take delight in their whimsical designs."

In 1919, Ben and his sister Bessie, opened a store on State Street in Chicago, combining their first names to create the famous Bes-Ben logo. The duo eventually expanded their business to include five shops. His hats were worn by Chicago's elite and also by some of the most influential women in America, including Judy Garland, Lucille Ball, Hedda Hopper and Elizabeth Taylor.

Green-field's original hats were not always as flamboyant and playful as the ones featured in the exhibition. His early hats were regarded as "normal" and in-line with the current fashion trends of the time until the outbreak of the Second World War, when restrictions were imposed on the use of wool and silk. Green-Field then became very creative with the materials that he incorporated in his hats. In 1941 he started making whimsical hats that he called "silly" hats and was quoted as saying, "Anything that makes people laugh at this point in world history may be said to have its own excuse for being". For these hats, his inspirations came from whatever was lying around at the time. He used unusual objects such as cookie cutters and little stuffed animals, to fake cigarettes and plastic furniture.

The prices for these unique creations, originally ranged from \$40 to \$1,000, and tended to exclude women on a budget. However, before closing the shop each summer, Green-field slashed prices at a midnight sale to as little as \$5 a hat. After 2 a.m., he would start throwing the unsold hats out the front door of the shop to be caught by the rabid bargain-hunters who had eagerly waited to get their very own Bes-Ben creation. Today vintage Bes-Ben hats are highly prized by collectors.

The core of the IMA's renowned Bes-Ben hat collection was donated in 1975 by Mrs. William H. Ball, who gifted 46 Bes-Ben creations to the Museum. Since then, the IMA has added significant Bes-Ben hats to its fashion collection as they become available at auction block and private sales, as well as through donations.

In 2003, through the generosity of Benjamin B. Green-Field Foundation, the IMA was fortunate to acquire seven extremely rare and early Bes-Ben hats. In 2004 and 2008, the Alliance of Newfields supported the acquisition of 13 additional Bes-Ben hats. Now, more than 60 of these hats, many of them never on view before,

will be on display together in the Gerald and Dorit Paul Galleries.

“To augment the exhibition, eight magnificent Bes-Ben hats are being borrowed from the Chicago History Museum, where Green-Field donated his diverse collection and personal archives,” said Paydar. “Additionally, a number of Bes-Ben ephemera and studio supplies along with historic photographs have been included in the exhibition to further enhance the experience for our guests.”

Members can see the exhibition first at the [Member-Only Preview](#) on April 19. Get inspired by *Bes-Ben* hats and wear your favorite headwear to The Fashion Arts Society’s signature acquisitions fundraiser, [Hats Off!](#), on April 24 beginning at 10:30 a.m. On Sunday, May 13, members can learn more about the popular Bes-Ben creations at a special Mother’s Day [Members-Only Talk](#) with Niloo Paydar, curator of textile and fashion arts, from 2–3 p.m. On Saturday, May 19 at 11 a.m. attend [Millinery & Mimosas](#), a hat-making workshop led by Amanda Joyner of Chef Bizzaro Millinery. Bring your friends along to sip mimosas and create a whimsical masterpiece at Newfields.

Tours for the exhibition will be on Sundays and alternate Thursdays (beginning May 3) at 3 p.m. *Bes-Ben: The Mad Hatter of Chicago* is on view from April 20, 2018 through January 6, 2019.

Experience more of [Hello Spring](#)

After exploring the whimsical fashion of Bes-Ben hats, discover all there is to do at Newfields this spring. The campus-wide celebration featuring more than 250,000 blooms, local brews on tap in the Beer Garden, wildflowers in The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park: 100 Acres, more inspiring exhibitions inside the Lilly House and more time to see it all, with our new expanded hours.

About Newfields

Newfields: A Place for Nature & the Arts, offers dynamic experiences for guests of all ages. The 152-acre cultural campus features art galleries, lush gardens, a historic mansion, performance spaces, a nature preserve and sculpture park. From inspiring exhibitions in the Indianapolis Museum of Art Galleries, to concerts in The Toby, and a stroll through The Garden with a glass of cheer, guests are invited to interact with art and nature in exciting new ways. Newfields is home to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, among the ten largest and oldest general art museums in the nation; the Lilly House, a National Historic Landmark; The Garden, featuring 40 acres of contemporary and historic gardens, a working greenhouse and an orchard; and The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park: 100 Acres, one of the largest art and nature parks in the country. The Newfields campus extends outside of Indianapolis with Miller House and Garden in Columbus, Ind.—one of the nation’s most highly regarded examples of mid-century Modernist architecture. For more information visit www.discovernewfields.org.

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